



What Do Individuals with Disabilities and Parents/Guardians Think?

"The comprehensive planning process has given stakeholders an important role in informing OSEP on how IDEA Part D national activities can help improve results for children with disabilities."

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Consumer Opinions Inform Part D National Program

In 1999, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) launched a long-range, comprehensive planning process for Part D of the reauthorized 1997 **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act** (IDEA)*. OSEP's goal for its Part D national program is to link best practices to states, school systems, and families to improve results for infants, toddlers, and children with disabilities. Part D of IDEA '97 authorizes national program activities and federal funding (see figure, this page).

OSEP undertook a significant initiative in implementing the Part D national program comprehensive planning process. Among

the activities undertaken were:

- Solicit opinions about the Part D national program through mass distribution of an opinion survey in both web-based and printed formats to obtain a general listing of preferences.
- Convene experts to identify issues in key program areas and make recommendations for how the Part D national program may address them.
- Use recommendations from the opinion survey, panels, and other national and state sources to develop a five-year Part D national program plan.

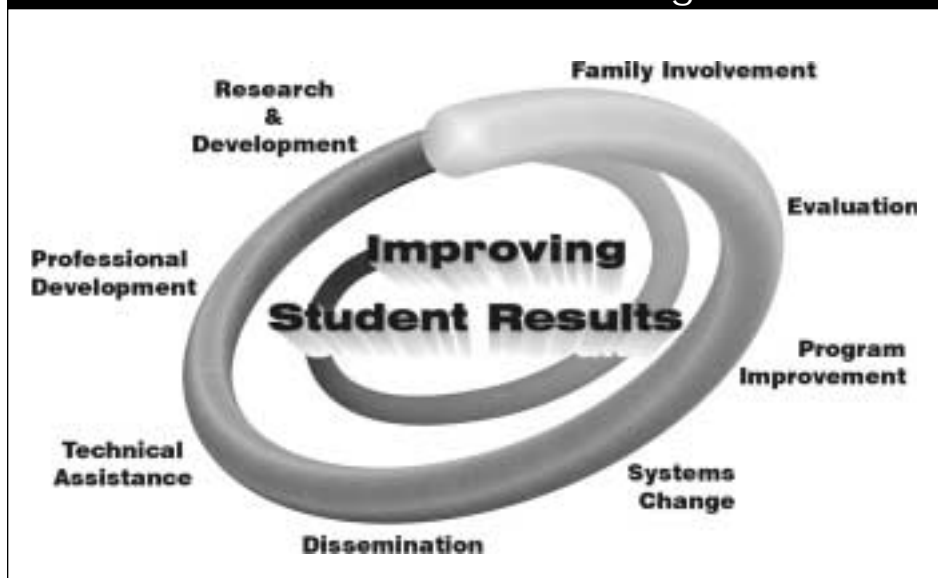
This brief reports on findings for a subgroup of consumers: individuals with disabilities and parents/guardians of individuals with disabilities.

Nationwide Outreach Effort Informs Program Directions

OSEP has a long history of involving stakeholders in its national programs and continually looks for new ways to guarantee that their opinions inform its planning efforts. Thus it is no surprise that OSEP began its Part D planning process by seeking the involvement of the broader education community—especially individuals with disabilities, parents of children with disabilities, professionals in the fields of general and special education, members of national organizations, and representatives of various levels of government—to share their needs and issues related to improving results for students with disabilities.

Outreach began on May 14, 1999, when

IDEA Part D National Program



representatives from more than 40 national organizations whose members are drawn from the key Part D consumer groups joined OSEP in generating survey items and planning strategies for soliciting opinions from their constituents on how best to improve results for children with disabilities and their families. Information from this meeting was used to develop opinion surveys that were prepared in both written and web-based formats, as well as made available in Spanish. Drafts were reviewed extensively by constituent groups for content and readability. The national organizations helped distribute information about the survey through membership and internal channels. Advertisements were placed in major educational periodicals and newspapers, and press packets were sent to the media, educational projects, and parent centers.

The outreach effort enabled OSEP to reach out to thousands of individuals who were interested in education across the country. More than 14,900 consumers—defined as individuals with disabilities and their families, teachers, administrators, and others employed to work with children with disabilities and their families—completed the opinion survey between April and September 2000.

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The viewpoints expressed across various groups—individuals with disabilities, teachers, related service providers, school administrators, and state administrators and policy makers—were similar and clear. However, groups tended to place a different emphasis on issues.

9,156 survey respondents indicated they

were individuals with disabilities or parents and guardians of individuals with disabilities. Their results follow.

Improving the Lives of Children with Disabilities

Individuals with disabilities and parents/guardians of individuals with disabilities reported that the lives of children with disabilities of all ages would be significantly improved if they could experience:

- Greater participation and success in the general education curriculum.
- Greater access to information and support for themselves and their families.
- Higher achievement in reading, writing, and mathematics.

Improving Service Delivery and Performance

Individuals with disabilities and parents/guardians of individuals with disabilities believe that improved results for children with disabilities and their families are linked to the provision of appropriate services and the adequate performance of a broad service delivery system. They identified the most overwhelming improvements needed in service provision and performance as:

- More and better qualified professionals (teachers, therapists, and other) to serve students with disabilities.
- Higher levels of skills for paraprofessionals and assistants who serve students with disabilities.

In addition to these top priorities, individuals with disabilities and parents/guardians of individuals with disabilities showed variability of responses according to the age group they represented. The survey asked respondents to indicate which age group they represented. The following priorities for improvement were selected by a large number of the individuals who

specified a particular age group:

- Improved identification of infants, toddlers, and children with disabilities (infants, toddlers, and preschoolers).
- Smaller class size and case load (infants, toddlers, and preschoolers; elementary).
- Increased use of appropriate instructional technology and materials (elementary, middle school, high school).

Next Steps

OSEP staff members are currently discussing the implications of consumers' opinions. The results of the opinion survey, along with the panels' findings and other relevant planning information—such as the findings of Parts B and C monitoring and oversight efforts and State Improvement Grant Program proposals, as required under Part D, Subpart 2 of IDEA—are being integrated by agency-wide staff workgroups into a comprehensive Part D national program plan. Once analyses are complete, the agency will map long-term research-to-practice strategies in each of the five broad Part D planning areas. The public will be invited to comment on the Part D national program plan before it is presented to Congress for approval. ■

**The comprehensive planning process is authorized by IDEA [sec. 661(1)].*

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